

VISITOR USE

VISITOR USE DATA

Ten Year Annual Data and Analysis

Isle Royale visitor use data has been collected since 1941. Since then there have been many management actions that influenced the numbers of visitors reported. Island visitor counts are a compilation of concessions and NPS ferry counts, day use boaters reported at the visitor centers, and overnight private boater camping permits. In 1984 the park began recording visitors to the Houghton visitor center and from 1986–1990 counted visitors at the Copper Harbor visitor center. Mainland visitor center totals are not included in the island totals.

For management purposes, visitor use of the island is the critical measurement. Table 11 shows the number of visitors to the island itself. Table 12 details passenger numbers. Overnight use (the number of visitors multiplied by the number of nights that they stayed on the island) is the most useful measure because the number of overnight stays has a direct bearing on the kinds and levels of impacts expected on resources and visitor experiences. Table 13 displays overnight use information on the island.

TABLE 11. ANNUAL VISITORS TO THE ISLAND

Year	Island Visitors
1996	17,122
1995	18,488
1994	18,725
1993	16,625
1992	16,751
1991	16,468
1990	16,258
1989	15,824
1988	13,951
1987	15,215

Much of that use is during the last two weeks in July and the first two weeks in August.

TABLE 12. PASSENGER NUMBERS

	1996	1995	1994
<i>Ranger III</i>	1,911	1,848	1,584
<i>Isle Royale Queen</i>	4,878	5,278	4,691
<i>Voyageur II</i>	1,422	2,476	1,610
<i>Wenonah</i>	3,226	2,544	3,262
Isle Royale seaplane	923	948	1,103
Private boats	4,859	5,539	6,408
Total	17,219	18,633	18,658

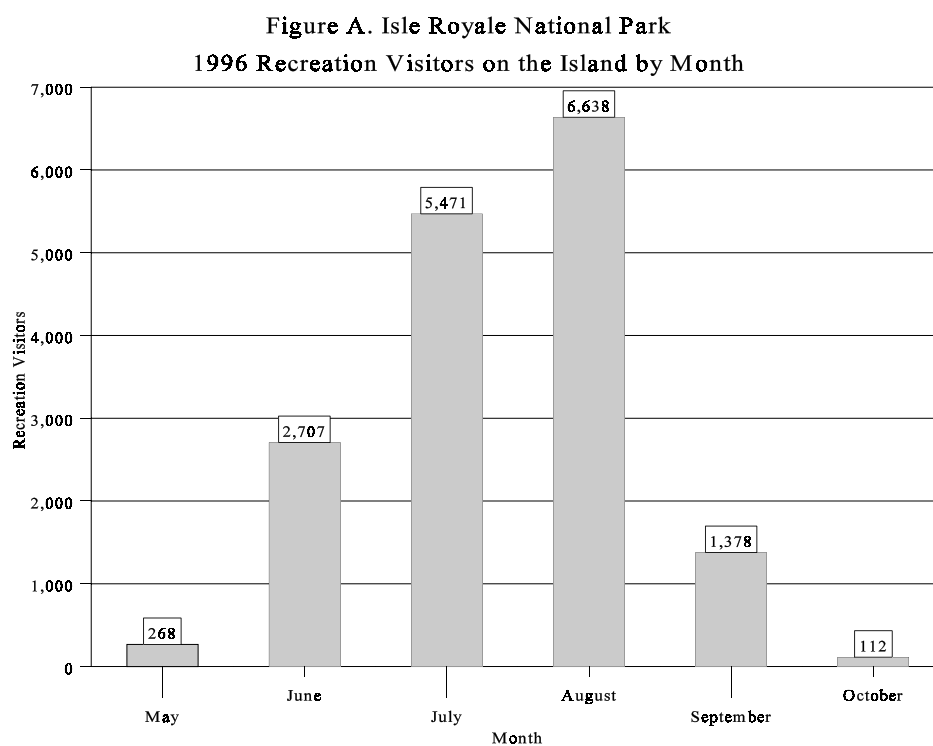
Source for tables: National Park Service, Public Use Statistics Program Center, and Isle Royale National Park

From 1986 to 1989 visitation to the island showed a pattern of increases and decreases. During the next four years (1990–1993) visitation was relatively constant. In 1994 and 1995 visitation increased by approximately 10%. There was a decline of 7.4% in 1996.

Length of Stay

In 1996 there were a total of 69,348 overnight stays. Average stay for overnight users was 4.7 days; when day users were included, the average stay dropped to 4.1 days. An overnight stay is defined as one visitor spending one night in the park for recreational purposes. As island visitation has increased and decreased over the years, so have overnight stays. Records have been kept since 1974, and there has been a steady increase in overnight stays since 1987.

Recent increases in overnight use have largely been a result of increases in visitor use during the months of July and August (table 14). Visitation during the shoulder seasons is low, but the rate of increase has been significant. The park is open to visitors from April 16 through November 1. Weather and ice conditions on Lake Superior dictate when visitors and park staff are able to arrive and depart. Over 70% of visitation takes place during July and August.



Source: National Park Service, Public Use Statistics Program Center and Isle Royale National Park

TABLE 13. OVERNIGHT STAYS 1987–1996

Year	NPCI Lodging*	Rock Harbor Marina	Rock Harbor and Windigo Campgrounds	Backcountry	Misc.	Nonrecreational Overnight	Total*
1996	8,273	1,432	8,343	46,625	4,035	640	69,348
1995	8,566	1,397	8,178	45,564	4,474	985	69,164
1994	7,962	1,628	8,665	43,673	4,262	1,192	67,382
1993	9,202	1,616	8,058	40,690	3,154	784	63,504
1992	9,512	1,456	7,397	39,663	2,243	915	61,186
1991	9,420	1,852	6,902	38,148	3,239	876	60,437
1990	8,696	1,537	6,981	37,489	3,769	706	59,178
1989	10,038	1,434	6,446	33,977	3,982	1,124	57,001
1988	9,921	2,368	5,932	31,807	4,016	1,217	55,261
1987	9,694	1,243	6,292	33,251	4,812	1,498	56,790

*These numbers are based on new information and do not match official NPS figures.

Note: Total overnight visitation to the island combines recreational and nonrecreational overnight visits. Miscellaneous includes boaters anchored out, life lessees and guests, NPS employee guests, and commercial fishermen and guests.

TABLE 14. OVERNIGHT STAYS BY MONTH AND TYPE (1996)

Month	NPCI Lodging	Rock Harbor Marina	Rock Harbor and Windigo Campgrounds	Backcountry	Misc.	Nonrecreational	Total
May	118	0	222	1,461	46	199	2,046
June	1,372	161	1,445	9,916	644	68	13,606
July	2,955	590	2,603	14,170	1,632	66	22,016
August	3,322	658	3,307	17,146	1,434	64	25,931
September	506	23	708	3,615	247	116	5,215
October	0	0	58	317	32	127	534
Total	8,273	1,432	8,343	46,625	4,035	640	69,348

Source for tables: National Park Service, Public Use Statistics Program Center

PROJECTIONS OF DEMAND

A projection of future visitor use for Isle Royale was made (tables 15 and 16). They are the best estimates available using a simple straight-line projection method and the island visitation data for 1986–1996. Projections of both the total numbers of visitors and the numbers of overnight stays are provided.

Park use is affected by many factors, but forecasted use is based solely on historical data, which is projected forward and assumes that whatever factors influenced visitation in the past will continue. Forecasting in this manner may provide reasonable estimates only if the changes that affected visitation continue. This may not be true over extended periods, so projections are less reliable over the long-term than they are

short-range. Caution is warranted when interpreting and using the results.

Growth rates of 1% and 3% are used for the projections. The figures represent a possible range of visitation growth over the next few years. The low range would result in an increase of fewer than 2,000 visitors to the island by 2007, or approximately 11.5%. The low growth projection for overnight stays is an increase of approximately 8,000, 11.5% over 1996 levels. For visitors to the island, the high forecast projects an increase of more than 6,500 visitors by the year 2007, more than a 38% increase over 1996. The high projection for overnight stays is for an increase of more than 38%, or 26,500 additional overnight stays.

Uncontrolled growth would have serious negative impacts on the resources and on the quality of the visitor experience. High levels of visitation could only be accommodated by allowing significant negative impacts on resources and visitor experiences. Managed visitation would reach an acceptable level of use and then be maintained to protect the resources and provide quality visitor experiences.

TABLE 15. PROJECTED VISITORS 1997–2007

Year	Projected Recreational Visitors	
	Low 1%	High 3%
2007	19,100	23,700
2006	18,900	23,000
2005	18,750	22,350
2004	18,550	21,700
2003	18,350	21,050
2002	18,200	20,450
2001	18,000	19,800
2000	17,800	19,200
1999	17,650	18,700
1998	17,450	18,150
1997	17,300	17,650

Source: National Park Service, Denver Service Center

TABLE 16. PROJECTED OVERNIGHT STAYS 1997–2007

Year	Projected Overnight Stays on the Island	
	Low 1%	High 3%
2007	77,350	96,000
2006	76,600	93,200
2005	75,850	90,500
2004	75,100	87,850
2003	74,350	85,300
2002	73,600	82,800
2001	72,900	80,400
2000	72,150	78,050
1999	71,450	75,800
1998	70,750	73,550
1997	70,050	71,450

Source: National Park Service, Denver Service Center, Resource Planning